

The Trumpeter

A Publication of the Friends of Elk Island Society
Winter, 2002



Website: <http://www.elkisland.ca>

E-mail: membership@elkisland.ca

Winter at Elk Island Park

by Eva Paul

Elk Island Park isn't just about camping, hiking, or picnicking on a sunny summer day! The Park is open year-round and there are many winter activities that you can enjoy. Here are some to get you started:

Camping

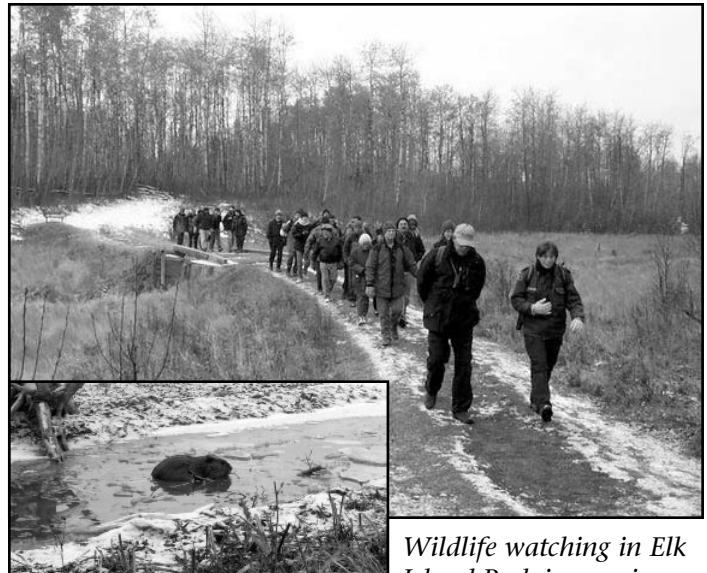
Winter camping is free at Elk Island! All you need is a valid day pass or annual pass. Camping is located at the boat launch parking area. There is also no charge for firewood, which is stocked at the nearby picnic area and cooking shelter. There is an outhouse handy, and you're near to the Lakeshore trailhead. Watch for owls at night, gaze at the stars, or enjoy the northern lights!

Hiking

All of the trails are open in the winter. Elk Island has 11 hiking trails ranging in length from 500m to 18.6km. Short or long, these trails offer fabulous wildlife viewing, fresh air, and a chance to find out what the Beaver Hills are all about! Some trails are groomed for skiing, so please be mindful of the tracks. Shoreline Trail is wheelchair-accessible but may ice over in the winter. Check out the bulletin board on the website (www.elkisland.ca) for information on the next guided hike!

Skiing and Snowshoeing

Hayburger, Simmons, Shirley Lake, Moss Lake, Beaver Pond, Tawayik, and Wood Bison trails may be groomed for cross-country skiing. Amisk Wuche and Lakeshore trails are available for snow-



Wildlife watching in Elk Island Park is a major interest of Park visitors. See pages 2 and 3 for stories of guided wildlife-watching hikes sponsored by the Friends of Elk Island Society.

shoeing. Call ahead to the office during the week to find out the trail conditions (992-2950). Watch for annual events such as the family ski day to be posted on the bulletin board.

Wildlife Viewing and Photography

It's easier to see the animals in the winter, without the leaves blocking your view! Bison, elk, moose, deer, and coyotes all remain in the park all winter. Dawn and dusk are the best times to see many of the mammals. Many small mammals stay active, and are easy to track in the snow. Bring along your field guide to identify their tracks! Year-round resident birds include chickadees, blue jays, woodpeckers, nuthatches and grouse.

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Beaver Walk

Beavers were the focus of the day on October 26, 2002, when 35 people came out to hike the Beaver Pond Trail in Elk Island National Park. Despite the chilly temperatures and early onset of pond ice, the group was not disappointed. Up to 6 beaver went about their daily activities in the water and on the ice near their lodge adjacent to the trail. Throughout the walk, people were able to explore the amazing world of North America's largest rodent. Beaver pelts, a skull, chewed trees, and beaver meadows offered a rare close-up look at the world of these wonderful engineers.

Beaver were once completely trapped out of the Beaver Hills and were not successfully reintroduced into the park until 1941. Now, they play a critical role in creating and maintaining wetlands and habitats for many other species of plants and animals.

Walk participants were able to witness the beaver's influence in action when some muskrats joined the beaver in their activities in the pond.

Currently, Elk Island National Park has approximately 140 active beaver lodges. This number is somewhat lower than in previous years – likely due to the record drought over the past 3 years.

The walk was guided by



The Beaver Walk was attended by 35 participants who hiked the Beaver Pond Trail, learning about the history, biology and ecology of beavers in Elk Island from Park Warden, Glynnis Hood.

Glynnis Hood, a Park Warden and Ph.D. candidate conducting research on beavers in Elk Island National Park and the surrounding area. The Park has a very high density of ungulates (hoofed mammals), many of which compete for the same food resources as the beaver. Hood's research aims to determine whether beaver inside the park boundaries use different food types than those immediately outside the park fence. In addition, she is looking at how beaver have changed the Park's landscape since their reintroduction and how these changes are influenced by extremes in climate and the use of prescribed fire. This study is just one example of some of the research projects that have received assistance from the Friends of Elk Island Society.

This hike was the first to be organized by the Friends since the establishment of the new Board of Directors. Future hikes

are in the works and the Board hopes to offer a monthly hike to FEIS members and the general public. With the onset of an early winter, the park offers an ever-changing landscape for visitors to explore, and, who knows, you might even see a beaver or two along the way!

–submitted by Glynnis Hood



Glynnis Hood shows a beaver skull to participants of the guided hike, offering an in-depth look at the beaver's special adaptations for chewing.

Our sincere thanks to STAPLES, Sherwood Park, for their support and sponsorship of The Trumpeter

Bison Walk

The history of Alberta often centers on the bison that roamed the prairies long before the coming of the white man. Few Albertans, however, understand the complexity of a bison herd. Wes Olson, Senior Park Warden at Elk Island National Park (EINP) explained the history and current status of the animals during a Bison Walk, held November 23, 2002, at the Park. The Friends of Elk Island Society organized the walk.

Wes initially hoped to find a viewable herd but the bison did not cooperate. He had to settle for a walk through an open flatland grass area, where a large number of bison bones had accumulated.

"The number of bison bones in one small area is



Park Warden Dave Oikle examines the remains of bison seen during the Bison Walk.



Senior Park Warden Wes Olson explains the history of bison to a young member of the Bison Walk.

probably related to an incident in mid 1970's when a herd of 30 animals tried to walk across the ice, fell through, and drowned," Wes explained.

In the early days, free-ranging bison used the Beaver Hills area as a wintering area. In early summer, they migrated east towards the Lloydminster area breeding grounds. They stayed on the open plains until September or October, then returned to the wooded area and the low-lying wetlands. They wintered mainly on tall sedge grass found in the wetlands. Bison cannot use their front feet to paw through the snow, as two-thirds of their weight is on their front feet. Instead, they use their heads and faces to push the snow away. In the sedge meadows, the snow is less packed

than on the flatland areas.

Wes also described the two different stages of weaning that take place for bison calves. The first is from their mother's milk in November or December. Each spring, when the bison cow is about to produce a new calf, she forcibly weans the yearling, psychologically. The yearlings bond together, a bond that lasts the rest of their lives. When calving season is over, the yearlings are allowed back into the herd. The female calves will stay with the female group for the rest of their lives. Bull calves will either form a new herd or join the nearest bull herd.

"I hoped people would leave the Bison Walk with a better understanding of determining the species, sex and age of remains they might find in the bush," commented Wes. "If someone finds bones, or especially if they find a fresh carcass, we would certainly like to know about it."

Members of the public who missed the Bison Walk may want to contact Wes. He plans to have a slide presentation on bison ecology on some cold winter night.

Wes can be reached at 780-992-2962.

Eva Paul is a Friend Indeed

Everybody, including the Friends of Elk Island Society (FEIS), needs a friend sometimes. When the FEIS Board of Directors needed assistance to update their computer files and financial records, Eva Paul became a true friend.

Park liaison official, Laurie Guyot, arranged for Eva to work in the FEIS office on a part-time basis until the FEIS office and filing systems were in order. Eva made short work of setting up a filing system and is now updating past files.

“Laurie called one day and asked me to help the FEIS update their filing and accounting systems,” Eva recalls. “At the time I was in school 5 days a week, had another part-time job and was involved in other activities, but the Park is important to me. I know the FEIS is very important in supporting the Park. I rearranged my schedule and here I am.”

When Eva’s current contract with EINP expires on December 14, 2002, she will spend a month in New Zealand on vacation with her family. She plans to return to work in EINP in January.

Eva was no stranger to the Park. She first worked at the entrance gate in 1999 as a Heritage Communicator.

“In those days, Visitor Services and the Interpreters worked together,” she adds. “They now work separately as Visitor Services and Heritage Presentation.”

She spent the year 2000 working as a research assistant in Thailand. “I was investigating bush meat usage,” she recalls. “We were basically looking at the illegal trade of bush meat and how the natives and poor people use



Eva Paul and her cat, Scratch.

it for survival. We also investigated the illegal trade of the exotic species including eagles, tigers and snakes to other countries, including Laos and Cambodia.”

Eva says she was offered snake, for food, numerous times and definitely passed it up.

Eva came back to work at EINP in 2001 and 2002, and finished her B.Sc. Environmental and Conservation Sciences degree at the University of Alberta in 2002.

In 2002, she helped Elizabeth Roberts, Supervisor for Visitor Services, with scheduling and did the bookings for group camping at Oster Lake and Sandy Beach Campground.

Eva plans to continue her career with EINP when she returns from New Zealand. We will all welcome her home in early 2003.

Did you know that the rolling hills and ponds that dominate the Elk Island National Park landscape are known as “knob and kettle” topography. It is thought that as the glaciers receded during the last glaciation, a large mixed mass of glacial till and ice blocks was “dumped”. As the ice melted, the surface collapsed to form the “kettles” leaving the higher areas as “knobs”. The “kettles” filled with water to form the ponds and sloughs that we see today.

Trail Talk – Exploring Shoreline Trail

by Eva Paul

Shoreline Trail is the only fully paved trail in the park, providing a 6km return stroll (also wheelchair accessible) along the South shore of Astotin Lake. I've long ignored Shoreline Trail, thinking that a paved trail would be boring. I was wrong!

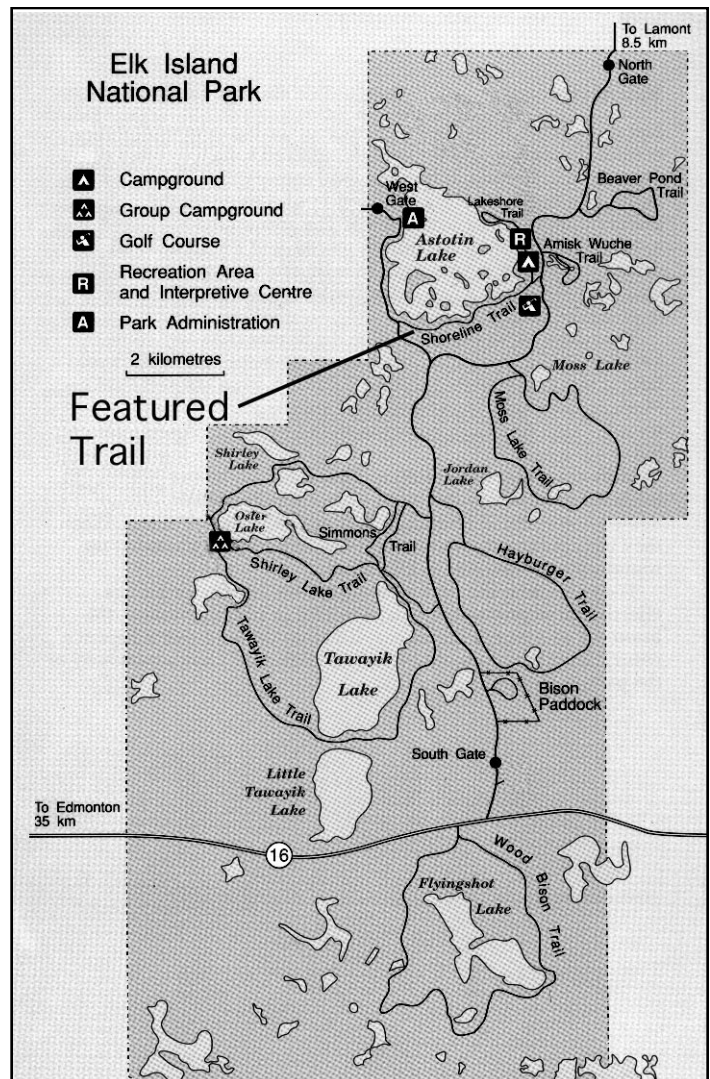
It's a charming trail with the many dips and rolls that Elk Island is known for. There are lots of signs of bison, elk, moose, and deer, as well as many small mammal tracks. We startled a ruffed grouse feeding by the trail. Even in the winter, the forest is teeming with life and activity!

At Beaver Bay, we stopped to check out the picnic sites, which are certainly the most scenic in the park! There are about six sites overlooking the lake on three sides of the peninsula, and a few in the middle. There is wood stocked year-round, and an outhouse available.

Further down the trail, we veered off to explore the actual "Elk Island". This offshoot of the trail is not wheelchair accessible. We followed coyote tracks along the edge of the frozen lake, which is crystal-clear. We stopped to look at the plants perfectly preserved in the ice, and could see a rock covered in frozen leeches! We also saw a short-tailed weasel, in his snow-white winter coat, scampering across



Large beaver lodges like this one can be seen from many of the trails in Elk Island.



Shoreline Trail is accessed from the Recreation Area, or from the Administration Road.

a fallen log. The setting sun shining off the slick ice told us that it was time to find our way back to the main trail.

Near the Administration end of the trail, we encountered an active beaver lodge. The water level was so low that we could see the "runs" they dig out on the bottom of the pond, to provide deeper channels in times of drought. They are "earth-movers", just like humans.

Shoreline certainly isn't a challenging trail, but it's a lovely walk on a crisp fall day. We managed to stretch our one-way trip to over two hours by exploring and taking pictures along the way.

FEIS Directors Attend Biennial Conference

Board of Directors members Neil Darlow, Stephanie Grossman, and Rick and Liz Watts attended the 10th Biennial Conference of the Canadian Parks Partnership (CPP). The Conference, held in Richmond BC, was hosted by the Gulf of Georgia Cannery Society.

The four-day Conference was filled with lectures, seminars, outings, and most importantly, networking opportunities.

"As new FEIS Board members, this was an important opportunity for us to learn what to do, how to do it and who to contact," says Liz Watts.

The Wine and Cheese Reception opened the way to meet old friends and make new ones!

"We quickly became notorious as the Elk Island bunch, not because there were 4 of us, but because we managed to talk to the same people separately and therefore gave the impression of a multitude," Liz adds. "Each day kicked off with a busy early breakfast, with announcements and presentations mingled with bacon, eggs and pancakes! On

Thursday, we discovered the latest addition to the National Parks, the Gulf Islands National Park Reserve." The Gulf Islands National Park is the first of the new group of 10 parks announced by Parks Canada.

The lectures and seminars offered participants insight into Special Event Planning. Delegates were advised to start [planning] early and make full use of a sub-committee. Speakers recommend that presentations be made lively and interactive. The subject of Ecological Integrity brought suggestions on how to maintain and enhance the attributes of each site. Other Conference topics included fund-raising and public awareness; Board Governance; and the use of guidelines, timetables and documentation.

The presentations on Gift Shop Management included merchandising and operations. Newsletters, they noted, should be eye-catching and informative while grant proposal writing should be clear, concise and often.

"The chance to learn from others' experiences was the most beneficial and rewarding

aspect of the Conference: learning what has worked in other parks, picking up ideas for centenary projects, offers of assistance and the chance to swap stories all made for a successful and worthwhile attendance," says Liz.

Delegates were taken, box lunch in hand, to view local heritage sites/museums, before attending a full afternoon of sessions.

The group feasted on barbecued salmon at the Gulf of Georgia Cannery, were energised by the Steveston Buddhist Church Taiko drum music and then exhausted by the Tiller's Folly, a country/folk group.

The Conference ended with a final breakfast meeting, last minute swapping of contact details and a short visit to a local bird sanctuary – in the rain!

"Overall, our attendance has given us an insight into how to make the Friends of Elk Island Society successful, how we can help promote the attributes of the park and how best to work with other organizations for the future," notes Liz.

-submitted by Liz Watts

Calling all Visionaries

If you would like to take an active part in the staging of events planned for Elk Island National Park over the next year, please contact
Liz Watts, Special Events Director, Friends of Elk Island Society.

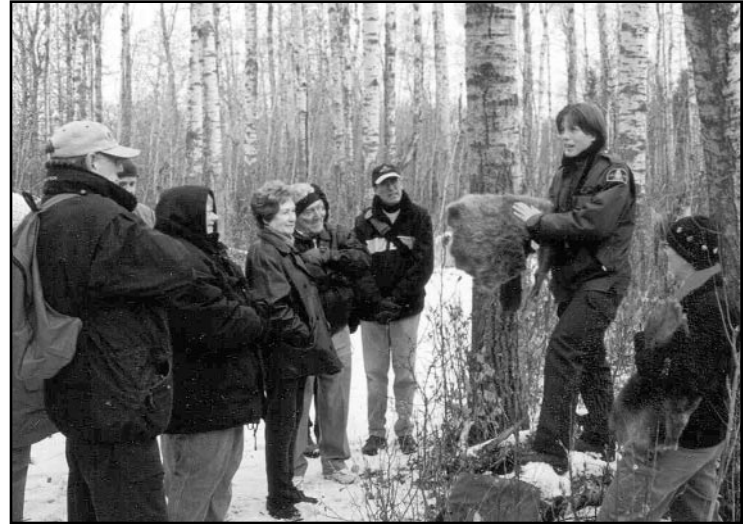
It is proposed to set up a small sub-committee which will be responsible for planning and managing all events – educational, social and especially fun!

Please contact Liz at: 780-922-5203 or events@elkisland.ca

The Friends' Photo Album



World-renowned artist and conservationist Robert Bateman was presented with copies of the Trumpeter during his October 18, 2002 visit to Fort Saskatchewan. Mr. Bateman has been a true friend of the Trumpeter Swan Reintroduction Program since its inception in 1990. His generous donations have played a very significant role in the success of the program.



Beavers and Bison – What's Next? Stay tuned to find out what the Friends of Elk Island has planned next. Check our website and your next newsletter for updates!



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FEIS Website Goes Live at <http://www.elkisland.ca>.

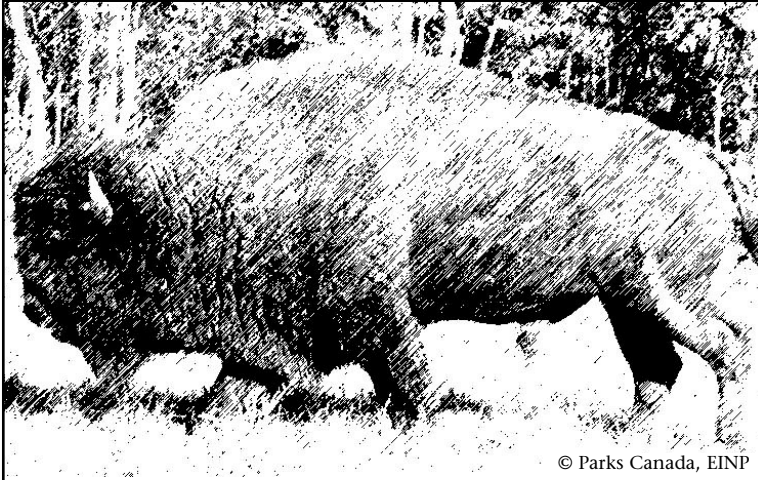
The Friends of Elk Island website went live in October in time for the announcement of the 'Beavers of Elk Island' walk, which took place on October 26, 2002. The site received 200 visits during the month, 100 of which were during the week before the walk. Not bad for the first week!

The site contains information regarding the Friends and projects that we support. It also hosts a bulletin board on which will be posted details of upcoming events and Park notices, such as trail reports. There is also a section for general discussion in which anyone can post questions or comments regarding the Park, the Friends and the website.

If you're looking for a weather forecast before taking a trip to the Park check out the weather link from the index page. It'll take you to the current weather and a 7-day forecast.

Comments regarding the site can be emailed to webmaster@elkisland.ca.

Special Offer for Young Artists and Writers



The Trumpeter needs stories and pictures from young Park visitors. Tell us about some thing you saw, and liked, in the Park. Perhaps you would rather draw a picture. If there is some thing special you would like to see the next time you visit Elk Island National Park, send us a picture or a note telling us about it and we will send you a special gift.

Be sure to include your mailing address with your story or picture so we can mail our gift to you. Please mail your pictures to Georgina Campbell at Box 856, Lamont, AB TOB 2R0. Written material can be sent e-mail to flwriter@telusplanet.net.

Stories for the Trumpeter

Do you have an interesting story about Elk Island National Park to share? The Trumpeter always needs new material on all aspects of the Park. If you have a story, or an idea, please contact Georgina at 780-895-7399. We ask only that stories relate to the Park and be not more than 400- 450 words. They may be edited for spelling, grammer, clarity and length.

Photos are also welcome. Please send original prints (4 x 6) if possible, or if sent electronically, please scan in greyscale at 150 dpi in a 4 x 6 size. Prints will be returned, if you include your address.

Mission Statement — Friends of Elk Island Society The Friends of Elk Island Society is a non-profit, charitable organization that co-operates with Parks Canada to promote understanding, appreciation and respect for Elk Island National Park. The FEIS fulfils this mission by participating in conservation, science-based research, the operation of a sales outlet, special events and providing services to its members. The FEIS raises funds and administers donations to further the objectives of the Society.

Membership Form

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone number: _____ Fax number: _____ E-mail: _____

Individual membership (\$10.00): _____ Family membership (\$15.00): _____

Donation: _____

If you are donating \$25.00 or more, please indicate whether or not you would like us to send you a tax receipt. Send your Membership Form and payment to: Friends of Elk Island Society Box 70, 9920-63 Avenue Edmonton, Alberta T6E 0G9 (780) 988-4842